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Nagsenvana, Aurangabad.



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“Quest for Identity”

20th January 2020

Certificate

This is to certify that Prof./Dr./Mr./Mrs./Ms. SANTOSH DADU GHANGALE

of

has actively participated / presented paper on Communal Identity in Baby Kamble's The Prisons
we Broke in the National Level Seminar

organised by Department of English, Milind College of Arts, Aurangabad.


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Communal Identity in Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*

Prin. Dr. Vaishali Pradhan

Mr. Santosh Dadu Ghangale

Autobiographies of Dalit women writers reflect and discuss various socio-political-cultural issues addressing to Dalit community. There is hardly any fictional motif in Dalit women autobiographies. Unlike Dalit men, only a few Dalit women have written their autobiographies and most of them have been written in regional languages and that they have hardly been translated into English. Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (original *Jina Amucha* in Marathi, translated by Maya Pundit in 2009) is an autobiography of not a Baby Kamble but an entire community. *The Prisons We Broke* is an evidence of the Casteism in India. The caste system not only treats Dalits as untouchables by reason of their birth and forces them into dirty jobs, but also segregates a large chunk of the population as lower castes and also forces them into various menial jobs by virtue of their birth. Casteism has not just killed millions of Dalit but also ruined generations of these subjugated people by keeping them away from civilization, education, development and social honour. Millions of people, for generation to generations together were reduced to a level much lower than animals. Casteism caused deaths of not only the body but also killed honour, self-esteem and the living spirit of a whole race for hundreds of years. Casteism is a slow poison which does not kill directly, but kills the spirit and consciousness of a person or society.

Sociologists have explained 'Community' as the group of people who are inspired by the common motives sharing similar characteristics. The community is incomplete without the people as they are the integral part of it. The community gets its identity through its culture and philosophy. The active participation in group and togetherness are observed in the while living in a community. The values are commonly followed and adhered for the unity of the group. In community a person having the quality of head and heart is unanimously accepted as the leader. The present research paper is about the struggle, mannerisms and lifestyle of the Mahar community portrayed in Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*. This memoir is highly influenced by the Ambedkarite Philosophy which has been considered as the greatest living force. The Ambedkarite movement is a pathfinder and great stimulating phenomenon for the Marathi Dalit Writers. Being born in Mahar community, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has been an epitome for the Mahar community itself and whole mankind in general. He has made painstaking efforts for the upliftment of Dalits. He has experienced the great injustice and animal like treatment personally. Therefore, he blazed with the feeling of revolt. No other mankind could rise from the ashes of untouchability and do such a Hercules task. His devotion and commitment towards Mahar community is an eye opening example for others. His sincere feelings and innermost zeal has liberated whole Mahar community from the clutches of untouchability and gave self-esteem to each 'Mahar'.

Dr. Ambedkar was of the opinion that no community could stand without the identical representation and it can be achieved through education only. He has referred education as a weapon to fight against injustice and inequality which is hardly understood by few of the people. He considers education as one of the strongest pillars of the society which lifts that community to the upward mobility. He further writes that the higher status of the community can be maintained by the education itself, nevertheless there can be a downfall of such community who cannot keep in line with the education.

Dr. Ambedkar has strongly emphasized the need of the women's education for the development of the society. After Mahatma Phule, he is the first personality who has stressed the dearth need of women's education for the development of any community. He personally channelized an active movement for the women's education therefore, he is widely accepted as the 'saviour of women'. Hardly any personality could think in such terms of humanity. He has not only activated the movement but also put the right to education to women in legal terms through Hindu Code Bill. These concrete efforts reflect his innermost feeling of justice to women that was denied from ages in the Mahar community itself. Dr. Ambedkar has got the returns of his efforts through Dalit women writers such as Baby Kamble, Shantabai Kamble, Shantabai Dani, Urmila Pawar, Pradnya Pawar, Chhaya Koregaonkar, Shilpa Kamble and. Once Dr. Ambedkar has said that he is really fortunate that he could do handful of efforts for his mothers and sisters of his community. But those handful of efforts have turned into the powerful arms through the vibrant writing of Dr. Sharmila Rege, an eminent international scholar. Baby Kamble is one of the prominent authors in Dalit writings. Her roots have been formed and developed in Mahar community. *The Prisons We Broke* is a revolting autobiography as it gets the dominance of Ambedkarite philosophy. The books and memories are fully influenced by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and his philosophy of participation of women in the Ambedkarite Movement. According to Dr. Ambedkar a community is more identical rather than a single man. Therefore, he has always insisted on the active communal participation in the movement.

Baby Kamble has expressed this communal identity through her memoir *The Prisons We Broke*. The word 'We' in the title itself shows the communal participation. As we know there is a famous proverb 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall'. Baby Kamble has also wrote and expected the same participation in the agitation. The memoir is written in form of a story telling which unfolds the various layers of community and its role to support Ambedkarite Movement. The Ambedkarite culture and revolt against set values and patriarchy is the premiere theme of Kamble's expression. Her writings are the collage of her experiences in village culture, *Mahar* society and *Hindu* society as well. It shows her love and affinity towards own community. Being 'Mahar' she feels proud of her community whereas, the mainstream treat her as a woman from downtrodden and cheap community. Once she expressed that how a single community can have two dimensions. She has no such duality in her mind towards the other community. But this feeling of otherness comes due to lack of education and retrospection. For Kamble, a community is like pot where we all dwell and form an identity. So it must be like a union of assimilationist who together can make a history. Baby Kamble's narration reflects her love for her own community without glorifying their terrible condition. Her tone shows the love and affection towards the people who are misbehaved in the hands of *savarnas*. It is not a pitiable memoir which always cracks over injustice and untouchability but the vivid picture of the life of common *Mahars* whose descriptions of ritual baths, unwashed children with dripping noses, the games and the weddings is portrayed. *The Prisons We Broke* is the internal trauma in the psyche of Mahar people who are going to be transformed into Buddhist religion. Baby Kamble presents the Mahar women as the real agents of the transformation. Her entire marginalized community finds a voice due to the *Dhammachakra Pravartan*.

Kamble writes-

"Why did Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar convert to Buddhism? Buddhism means good character. The person who preaches Buddhism has to be morally upright and lead a virtuous and uncorrupted life. Advice from a pure tongue such as the Dalit saint Chokha Mela, will transform millions of followers of Bhim into pure beings. The aim

is to serve Mother India well. That is why Dr. Ambedkar introduced Buddhist philosophy as the path of truth and righteousness.”(pg. 82 *The Prisons We Broke*)
She remains grateful towards Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and says-

“It was our Bhim who finally breathed life into lifeless statues, that is, the people of our community” (pg. 82 *The Prisons We Broke*)

The Mahar community is known as the brave group of people who fight for the right. The incidents of the bravery of the Mahar people is described by Baby Kamble in the memoir. The Mahar community is having self- respect, honesty, workaholic attitude and courage. The upper classes have called them as *Yeskars* who receive stale food and eating the meat of dead animals. In the memoir Baby Kamble says-

“They receive so many bhakris from the villagers in return for their duties as a yeskar that you will find nothing but bhakris drying all over the place” (pg. 54 *The Prisons We Broke*)

The community is superstitious and believes in ghosts and magic. They believe that the person is haunted as he has gone to cemetery or river. Sometimes they wait for the ghost to leave the body of the person who is having disease. They work heavily for the *Patils* of the villages and then only get bread and butter which is not full of belly. Such miserable life shows the struggle of the Mahar community to get the bread and butter.

Kamble has never kept this memoir as self-centered but made it as wide and open as the mouthpiece of the Mahar community. Most of the time she has used the pronouns ‘We’, ‘Us’, ‘Our’, ‘His’ for showing her communal, inclusive and assimilationist approach. Kamble’s text is the portrayal of the struggle and sufferings of her entire community as they tried to make a move from traditional prisons towards modernity. It reflects the transition and diversity of female figures in Mahar community. In some ways they were successful, especially in the spread of education and protesting the caste system.

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